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ABSTRACT

This document is intended to assist teachers and managers in England's schools sector in their efforts to introduce an effective and flexible curriculum at Key stage 4 (ages 14-16) that extends to work-related learning. The first two-thirds of the document discusses the following steps in managing curriculum change: (1) make curriculum change a high priority; (2) provide support to achieve success; (3) plan and provide resources for effective curriculum change; (4) ensure that all pupils participate in work-related learning as part of their entitlement; (5) work to strengths and field the best team to participate in new curriculum initiatives; (6) make use of external partners to achieve successful curriculum change; (7) provide effective leadership to drive change; (8) create a shared approach as a vehicle for effective change; (9) recognize and use staff contributions; (10) disseminate good practice; (11) gain the confidence of staff; (12) deal with negative perceptions of change and professional development; and (13) recognize and deal effectively with staff wants and needs. The remainder of the document presents three case studies showing how three very different high schools coped successfully with curriculum change and achieved significant improvements from the standpoints of quality and range of courses provided and levels of student achievement. (Contains 40 references.) (MN)

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managing curriculum change in schools

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Improved Flexibility Support Programme

Run by the Learning and Skills Development Agency:

- we offer support to teachers and managers to deliver high-quality vocational courses to young people
- all our activities are backed by a programme of research and evaluation
- the Increased Flexibility Support Programme is sponsored by the DfES and all activities are subsidised.

Contents

Preface	
Introduction	1
Successful strategies	**3**
Make curriculum change a high priority	5
Provide support to achieve success	6
Plan and resource for effective curriculum change	7
Ensure that all pupils participate in work-related learning	8
Work to your strengths and field your best team	9
Make use of external partners	10
Provide effective leadership to drive change	11
Create a shared approach as a vehicle for effective change	12
Recognise and use staff contributions	13
Disseminate good practice	13
Gain the confidence of staff	14
Deal with negative perceptions of change and professional development	15
Recognise and deal effectively with staff wants and needs	16
Case studies	**17**
Netherhall School	19
Skerton Community High School	21
Westleigh High School	23
Bibliography	25

Preface

This publication has been produced by the Learning and Skills Development Agency's Increased Flexibility Support Programme. Funded by the Department for Education and Skills, the programme exists to support head teachers and teachers to plan and implement vocational qualifications for 14–16 year olds.

The book is based on three schools' experiences of managing curriculum change and is supported by general change management strategies that have been successfully adopted in the schools and FE sectors. In compiling it, the authors also drew on their wealth of experience in teaching and managing vocational training programmes. Cheryl Jones is an FE inspector, education consultant and author, with a plethora of knowledge and experience of quality issues. Mary Potter has worked in the FE and secondary school sectors for over 25 years and is experienced in the planning, delivery and monitoring of vocational education and training programmes.

We are very grateful for the help and support of the head teachers and staff from the three research schools, whose experiences underline the need for managing curriculum change successfully.

Nazir Ebrahim

Nazir Ebrahim
Programme Manager
Increased Flexibility Support Programme

Introduction

The schools sector is constantly changing due to government reforms, like the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects, and measures adopted by individual schools to improve the curriculum offer or provide work-related learning at Key stage 4 alongside traditional academic qualifications.

This publication aims to assist teachers and managers in schools to introduce an effective and flexible curriculum at Key stage 4 that extends to work-related learning. It is clear that schools will need to collaborate with education-business links organisations (EBLOs), National Training Organisations (NTOs) and employers, and participate in local and regional networks as they plan and implement the new vocational qualifications for 14–16 year olds. Schools will also need to work more closely with FE colleges to consider ways of developing effective teaching and learning styles and share good practice. This collaborative approach to working will help to ensure that young people can participate in high-quality and coherent work-related learning.

How to use this guide

Managing curriculum change in schools is split into three sections:

- successful strategies
- case studies
- bibliography.

Successful strategies

Use the successful strategies to generate ideas for improving change management in your school.

Case studies

The case studies show how three very different schools have coped with curriculum change. List the similarities and differences between your organisation and the schools featured. Group them under people, organisation, environment and technology. How does your list affect the way your school will manage curriculum change in the future?

Bibliography

Use the bibliography to extend your reading and understanding of change management.

Change management involves many factors: quality, resources, teachers and senior managers, pupils and funding, to name a few. But above all, it is about processes – how to get where you want to be. This chapter looks at some of the issues faced by the three schools researched for this guide and then proceeds to examine how a school can implement curriculum change by detailing prove change management strategies.

Make curriculum change a high priority

Giving high priority to curriculum change is the first step to creating an environment where effective change can take place. The senior management team (SMT) needs to be committed to the new initiative and demonstrate its commitment to staff. Recruiting a member of staff to the SMT and making them responsible for the curriculum change, such as enhancing work-related learning, is one way of demonstrating to teachers that it is a high priority at the school. If teaching staff see that the SMT is dedicated and enthusiastic about making changes to the curriculum, they should also give it high priority.

Saying curriculum change is a high priority is one thing, demonstrating it is quite another. The actions of the SMT will set the tone of all curriculum initiatives, whether positively or negatively. Managers need to communicate and demonstrate their priorities clearly.

- Ensure that any changes to the curriculum are explicit in strategic, operational and development plans.
- Place curriculum change at the top of agendas for SMT, departmental/faculty and course meetings, and make it a standing item through the development, implementation and evaluation phases.
- Provide a clear picture of how the change will affect teachers and pupils, and the school as a whole.
- Recruit a member of staff to the SMT who has vocational experience and a proven track record in change management. Make them responsible for work-related learning.
- 'Walk the shop floor'. Be visible and find out at first hand what's happening within the school. Use this as an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the change.
- Try to ensure that a member of the SMT is present at some course team meetings to identify teachers' support needs and to demonstrate the importance placed on curriculum change.
- Create and distribute a curriculum newsletter to all staff, parents and other partners, to share information and minimise surprises.
- Spread the word that work-related learning can and does increase pupil motivation, improve attendance and discipline and 'brings pupils back to a learning/education frame of mind'.

Provide support to achieve success

Teaching staff are more likely to accept changes to the curriculum if they are given additional support during the development and implementation phases. Providing someone that teachers can turn to for active support on a day-to-day basis and time for them to consider how mandatory national curriculum requirements may be implemented at a local level will benefit the change management process. Teachers have stated over and over again that the greatest support they receive, and indeed appreciate, is time to plan and implement their job roles and responsibilities properly.

- Divide big changes into manageable, more familiar steps. Let staff familiarise themselves with the changes by taking small steps first.
- Develop the coaching skills of managers so that they spend less time telling and more time helping and empowering.
- Demonstrate your commitment to change by being visible and available for staff. Ask how you can help them and use 'we' and 'us' where possible to emphasise the fact that the change is a shared priority.
- Channel resources to where they are most needed. Help people to feel compensated for the extra effort and time required for implementing the change.
- Give praise and take time to listen to people.
- Be prepared to let people express feelings about the past and create excitement about the future.
- Ensure that the SMT have a working knowledge and understanding of the demands of new curriculum initiatives. This will enable them to offer appropriate support to frontline staff.
- Consider reviewing the pupil/teacher ratio as a means of providing support where it is needed.
- Make time available for a member of staff to regularly trawl the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), LSDA and awarding body websites to obtain the latest information and disseminate it to all relevant staff. This will keep teachers up to date and ensure that they are compiling relevant teaching material.

Plan and resource for effective curriculum change

As with anything, curriculum change is most effective when it is planned. This includes costing the process in terms of resources and time. For example, teaching staff may need time, both individually and collectively as course teams, to interpret changes to the national curriculum and consider how they affect the delivery of their programmes. It is vital that time is set aside for teachers to undertake industrial placements linked to their teaching too. Allocating a realistic amount of time and resources to change management will help to ensure that change is a success and also reinforces the SMT's commitment to the initiative. Most new curriculum initiatives make demands on resources such as specialist equipment and accommodation. Rooms for practical activities will be highly sought after to meet the needs of work-related learning. Plan for this anticipated demand.

- Be realistic about the timescales and resources needed for effective change, taking into consideration people's readiness and capacity for change.
- Look for pioneers and innovators who can motivate others.
- Allow for degrees of participation at the planning stage.
- Define what is non-negotiable and leave room for choices to be made.
- Encourage more efficient working. Set deadlines by which certain outcomes should be agreed.
- Ensure that rooms for practical activities are fit for purpose and adequate in number to meet curriculum needs.
- Eliminate casualties of curriculum development by carrying out effective planning, re-training and staff development.
- Ensure that time is made available for staff to undertake work placements linked to their teaching commitments.
- Ensure that timetablers are aware of the needs of a vocational curriculum at the planning stage. Consideration must be given to blocks of time for work experience.
- Remember that implementing a change takes time. Schools that have introduced curriculum change effectively have allowed nine to twelve months for planning and preparation.

Ensure that all pupils participate in work-related learning as part of their entitlement

All young people should have an opportunity to participate in work-related learning, particularly at Key stage 4. Work-related learning is not just for low achievers. If that is how it is perceived by the SMT, then teachers, pupils and parents will interpret it as low-quality provision, and this in itself will contribute to low self-esteem. Pupils' behaviour and ultimately their ability to achieve is a reflection of teachers' and parents' expectations of them.

- Design a relevant and motivating curriculum.
- Link work-related pathways to community regeneration, where appropriate.
- Aim to certificate all learning experiences.
- Undertake effective timetabling to promote a flexible curriculum that integrates both academic qualifications and work-related learning, and encourages pupils to undertake out-of-school vocational activities without it proving detrimental to their other studies.
- Use real work situations in teaching sessions rather than hypothetical scenarios.
- Use the experiences of pupils who have part-time jobs.
- Celebrate success that raises the esteem of pupils, parents and staff. This is considered critical in an area of deprivation. Publicising success stories will increase the take-up of work-related programmes.
- Provide high-quality work-related learning at Key stage 4 – it can increase progression into further education.
- Use work-related learning as a vehicle to improve attendance, discipline and the image of the school.
- Ensure that work-related learning is an integral part of the curriculum, not a bolt-on extra.

Work to your strengths and field your best team to participate in new curriculum initiatives

Working together, the whole school can be your best team. The diverse strengths of individual staff members can make the teaching team strong if they are used sensitively and appropriately. Take the time to find out the strengths, talents and abilities of your teaching team by undertaking a thorough skills and experience audit. Just because a member of staff has been recruited to undertake a specific role, does not mean they do not have other strengths, talents and abilities that could be used at the school. Encourage teaching staff to share their expertise. It could benefit both them and the school.

- Find out the strengths, talents and abilities of staff. Undertake an official skills audit to find out individual's interests and experiences.
- Map skills to specific elements of curriculum change at an early stage of planning.
- Create a database of experience and expertise and keep it up to date.
- When staff participate in a new curriculum initiative, explain why they are involved and what skills and experience they bring to it.
- Select staff and departments/faculties who are committed to change and continually demonstrate their cooperation. Enthusiasm is infectious.
- Make opportunities available for all staff to be involved in new initiatives, if they wish. Staff who are not involved in new curriculum initiatives may feel jealous of extra funding, so opportunities for all staff to benefit from the spin-offs of the new curriculum initiatives, for example teaching and learning styles, should be made available across the school.
- Work-related learning offered within one faculty or department can be used to empower staff, creating ownership.

Make use of external partners to achieve successful curriculum change

Schools that have succeeded in implementing curriculum changes have had the support of many individuals and organisations. Skerton Community High School (see case study 2) was a low-achieving school that turned itself around by linking up with a college.

Raise parents' awareness of new curriculum initiatives and involve them at every opportunity. Gain their support in obtaining the commitment of pupils to play their part in the curriculum change. Use the mother who works in a travel agents, the father who is a hotel manager, the elder brother who is a nurse; all parties can make valuable contributions to the delivery of a work-related curriculum. Get in touch with local companies to find out if they would be willing to support the school's work-related curriculum. Could they provide materials to make teaching and learning more authentic, or do they offer work experience to pupils?

- Make contact, develop and maintain productive links with local colleges.
- Where needed, consider buying in expertise from the local college to deliver units of the curriculum within the school community. This could promote the dissemination of good practice and contribute to a change of culture at the school.
- Where possible, select college lecturers who have previously taught at a school and have patience and empathy with the level of pupils they will be teaching.
- If appropriate, develop links with specialist companies to offer NVQs.
- Foster strong industrial links.
- Make full use of awarding bodies' regional staff and resources.
- Develop productive links with local education-business link organisations and take full advantage of support offered.
- Consider the EBLO teacher placement scheme to provide appropriate work experience placements for staff.
- Participate in local and regional networks and get involved in writing groups to produce assignments and other teaching materials with colleagues.
- Make full use of Industry Training Boards, wherever possible.

Provide effective leadership to drive change

Effective leadership is key to creating a culture of change management within an organisation. Good departments/faculties tend to have an effective head – a specialist in their field, who leads from the front by setting an example of hard work, flexibility, responsiveness and commitment. Effective leaders have the ability to listen and hear what is being said, have developed excellent monitoring and coaching skills, and are able to provide feedback to teachers in a constructive and supportive manner.

- Provide a clear vision and communicate it in an inspirational way. Explain what the change means in positive terms for staff and, most importantly, for the pupils.
- Arrange regular staff meetings as a means of updating staff.
- Have a clear rationale for change that is grounded in research.
- Recognise and value the contributions made by individuals.
- Have a clear communication plan at the outset and keep to it.
- Develop good listening skills and the ability to respond to what is being said.
- Seek opportunities to talk to individuals, teams and the whole organisation about the change.
- Develop excellent mentoring and coaching skills.
- Create leaders of change at all levels and empower them.
- Be clear and firm about what is negotiable and what is fixed, so that energies are maximised, conflict is reduced and the direction is clear.
- Adopt a blend of top-down and bottom-up approaches.
- Demonstrate a solution-based approach.
- Ensure that the SMT is brought up to speed and continually updated with the demands of a vocational curriculum.

Create a shared approach as a vehicle for effective change

Curriculum changes, such as *Qualifying for success*, vocational A-levels and key skills, have been introduced by the Government using a top-down approach. It does not follow that the best way to interpret and adopt the changes at local level is by a curriculum manager also taking a top-down approach.

For curriculum initiatives and quality systems to work, they need to be owned by the teaching staff who have a vested interest in their success. New systems, procedures and initiatives work best when they are introduced using a bottom-up approach and owned by the staff who are required to implement them. Teaching staff ought to be given an opportunity to share in the responsibility for shaping curriculum change and quality systems that ultimately they will be required to implement. Schools with a democratic academic board, with strong teacher representation, help to create a shared approach to curriculum change.

- Set up working groups that have a clear remit, reporting and accountability lines.
- Create action research groups to inform policy and strategy.
- Consult with staff from the beginning.
- Use focus groups to get close to perceptions and feelings that can indicate how best to move forward.
- Create quality improvement groups to address specific issues.
- Give stakeholders the opportunity to shape the future.
- Develop the mentoring and coaching skills of managers so that they spend less time telling and more time helping and empowering.

Recognise and use staff contributions

Using the expertise of staff can have positive effects on instigating change and can improve staff morale. Schools that are most successful at change management are those that consult with staff at all levels. Consultation makes staff feel valued and shows that the SMT is committed to the initiative and open to suggestions. It also creates a sense of teamwork.

- Publicise individual and group contributions to new initiatives.
- Celebrate success.
- Build effective teams that include individuals with recognised expertise and experience.
- Develop the listening and consultative skills of managers.
- Orchestrate sessions that encourage participation and teamwork and discourage blocking manoeuvres and other politics.

Disseminate good practice

Develop a mechanism for disseminating good practice across the school. Staff and departments/faculties not involved in a particular curriculum initiative can benefit indirectly from lessons learnt. If lecturers from the local college are used to deliver vocational units at the school, disseminate good practice across the school such as innovative teaching and learning styles. Look for evidence of previous success, such as Young Enterprise and Part One GNVQ, that can be used to champion further change.

- Use good practice to influence a change of culture.
- Use lessons learnt from previous curriculum initiatives.
- Compile assignments and teaching and learning materials as a team to share good practice.
- Organise team-teaching sessions.
- Use teaching mentors.
- Participate in reflective practices so that good practice can be identified and weaknesses overcome with the sharing of ideas and alternative ways of doing things.
- Arrange dissemination of good practice briefing sessions.
- Provide Inset days where colleagues share experiences in a structured way.
- Publicise innovative and good practice in the school's newsletter.

Gain the confidence of staff

It is vital that staff who are ultimately responsible for curriculum change have professional credibility in the eyes of teaching staff. To gain that credibility, school SMTs need to have current working knowledge of what is being taught, an understanding of the demands of teaching, and an active involvement in professional development activities linked to curriculum change.

- Recognise that perceptions shape attitudes and influence behaviour and that these may need to be addressed for change to be effective.
- Have a clear communication strategy that is applied at all stages of the change.
- Ensure that managers at all levels regularly undertake appropriate professional development.
- Ensure that managers maintain an up-to-date working knowledge and understanding of the curriculum.
- Develop the listening skills of managers.
- Look for opportunities to communicate with staff about curriculum matters and how any changes will impact upon them.
- Organise workshops and training sessions to update teachers on national initiatives, such as the new GCSEs in vocational subjects.
- Respond to staff queries with clear, non-threatening explanations.
- Encourage staff to attend group meetings and work as a team. Praise strengths and contributions, and appreciate time given up.

Deal with negative perceptions of change and professional development

Head teachers and other SMT colleagues can be seen as an avoidable cost that takes away resources from the real business of teaching. Staff need to see that the SMT is committed to the pupils, teachers, effective change management and the quality of provision. SMTs who do not adequately resource teaching areas in preparation for delivering new provision, such as GCSEs in vocational subjects, are sending out messages to teachers that it can be delivered 'on the cheap.' This approach only serves to demoralise staff and downgrade provision.

Teachers need to be kept informed of curriculum change and be given the opportunity to take part in professional development activities. If a school fails to invest in its staff, it can leave them feeling undervalued and ill-prepared for any curriculum changes.

- Show that the SMT is committed to pupils, teachers, curriculum change and the quality of provision.
- Adhere to action plans and recommendations made by inspectors and external moderators.
- Keep teachers informed of mandatory national changes as they are announced.
- Ensure that teachers have the necessary professional development to meet the changing needs of the curriculum. This includes the opportunity to participate in industrial placements.

Recognise and deal effectively with staff wants and needs

Teaching staff want and need support and effective leadership. Open lines of communication and positive relations between themselves and the SMT are required if change management is to be effectively instigated. The majority of teachers also want to influence the design of quality systems so that they will bring meaningful benefits to themselves and their pupils.

Teachers should be given an opportunity to express their opinions on curriculum changes and to put forward any suggestions they might have. Consulting with staff makes them feel that their professional opinion is of value and shows that the SMT is putting their experience to good use.

Some form of professional development activity, linked to the course portfolio and long- and short-term goals of the organisation, can help to address professional needs and wants within an institution. Make staff development a high priority and allocate this responsibility to a senior manager, such as the deputy head teacher.

- Provide strong and effective leadership, open lines of communication and promote positive relations between teaching staff and the SMT.
- Consult staff and make them feel that their opinions are valued.

Netherhall School

Netherhall School is a comprehensive school for 11–18 year olds with over 850 pupils on roll. Although it is set in a small town, Netherhall is essentially a rural community school within an area of high unemployment. With the decline of the coal and steel industries there is a lack of confidence about the future. The head teacher believes, however, that the town is now 'pointing in the right direction' and the school needs to support regeneration by providing youngsters with high-quality provision that allows them to gain confidence by certificating all experiences.

About nine years ago the school wanted to change and offer a wider and better provision. It first introduced CPVE and followed this with units of accreditation from BTEC/City and Guilds. It now offers Part One GNVQs, AVCEs, key skills and a work-related pathway with college links and a world-of-work emphasis. The SMT and a very democratic academic board were all involved in the decision to offer these qualifications. From the outset the college developed strong links: with the local college and Education Business Partnership (EBP) and Young Enterprise. Now 50% of pupils are involved in vocational learning from Key stage 4 upwards and the SMT is looking to expand this area and is consulting with staff.

The SMT decide on staffing, resources and timetabling. There is concern that some staff may not wish to be involved in extending vocational provision and there is presently an attempt to restrict the team in order to maintain continuity. Individual and school development plans identify staff development needs that are linked to curriculum change. So far there has been little opportunity for staff to undertake work experience in industry linked to their teaching responsibilities. However, this will be considered for the future in the light of GCSEs in vocational subjects.

Curriculum change and a quality provision are high priorities at the school. Staff believe that their school recognises and values their experience and the greatest support they value is time. Staff feel that they 'own' curriculum initiatives – mostly through the academic board. The barriers to curriculum change within their school could come from a lack of time, finance, resources, timetabling and rooms. Recruitment to GCSE provision could also affect recruitment onto vocational programmes.

There are at present four clear curriculum pathways: GCSE, GNVQ, mixed qualifications (Expressive Arts/Enterprise/ICT) and the work-related pathway. Up to two years ago any pupil could mix and match, but the present system could prevent a young person wishing to take up civil engineering from having access to practical involvement. The new GCSEs in vocational subjects are seen as a potential solution to this problem.

The selective nature of the league tables is still driving a wedge between vocational and academic provision as they are the major measure of schools and exclude half of the population. It is acknowledged by the head teacher and staff that schools should be publicly accountable, but they believe that the information should be within context.

The strong move into vocational education has had a number of successful outcomes. It has provided a quality provision, enhanced job prospects and raised achievement, motivation and expectations. There has been excellent publicity for the school, particularly through the Young Enterprise scheme, which is good for the reputation of the school. There is strong support from Cumbria Tourist Board and good and willing support from local employers. Cumbria Tourist Board offers customer service training within the school and is presently writing a work experience handbook to include school input and all aspects of work within the industry.

Parental response is still not too strong and there is a perceived need to educate local parents. A weekly newsletter is sent from the school and the local press is used to good advantage. Learning mentors will be appointed next year. There is a commitment to vocational education within the school that is evidenced by the appointment of four curriculum directors, one with specific responsibility for this area of provision.

Staff at Netherhall School gave the following advice to schools involved in managing curriculum change: 'Give plenty of time to planning; get the staffing right; have strong support from the SMT; make industrial links; and liaise with pupils and parents. Keep the parents informed on what is going on and remember to timetable for practical work.'

Skerton Community High School

Skerton Community High School, an 11–16 comprehensive, was a low-achieving school that turned itself around through the successful implementation of vocational courses. When the present head teacher and deputy head were appointed there had been no staff meetings for the previous two years. Morale was low and GCSE results were very poor. GCSE General Studies was taught to all pupils but only a quarter were actually entered. The head teacher called a full staff meeting and announced that in his view the school would die without change and that he had 'taken out insurance on his mortgage' and recommended other staff to do likewise.

The school bid into the second round of the Part One GNVQ pilot and made good contact with Lancaster and Morecambe College. They chose to work with the two departments of the college that had shown the most cooperation, and the decision to offer initially Part One GNVQ Leisure and Tourism and Business was made. They now also run Part One GNVQ Health and Social Care and a full GNVQ in Performing Arts. In 2000/01, twenty students achieved the equivalent of six GCSEs, representing one Part One GNVQ plus a Full Award. The school also offers a variety of NVQs linked directly to individual companies and based on individual strengths and abilities. This area of work is presently under review because of the cost of running NVQs.

Many organisations and individuals have contributed to the successful management of the curriculum change. Although the awarding body approval process required at the time was initially found to be a 'pain' the school soon realised that it meant that quality systems were in place from the beginning. It valued the support and help from regional staff. Links with the local college have been essential and the EBP has supported both GNVQs and NVQs.

Skerton Community High School had a year of planning and staff were consulted from the beginning. It was able to use the expertise of staff who showed an interest in the changes. One of the advantages of being a small school is that strengths and interests of the staff are well known, but an official audit of staff interests and experience was also carried out. As a result, it was possible to use the experience of one member of staff who was an international athlete. To supplement the school's own teachers, staff from the local college were brought in. One with previous school experience and empathy for the level and type of teaching and learning involved was asked to stay on full time. He is now head of the faculty of vocational education and technology. A charismatic teacher, who has won the Edexcel Teacher of the Year Award for his innovative approaches and use of 'real rather than hypothetical situations', he has been the focal point for a major shift in the way the school approaches vocational teaching and learning.

The SMT's decision about the extent of the links with the college has had dramatic results. Although the college is geographically relatively close to the school, if Skerton pupils had simply been sent there the course would have been seen as a bolt-on extra by the staff and good practice in teaching and learning styles would not have spread across the school. The head teacher believed that if Skerton pupils were taught at the college it would have sent out the message to staff that they were incapable of running the courses.

Communication between the SMT and staff is seen as vital and there are now regular staff meetings and briefings every morning. Of particular importance is the management of curriculum changes. It is possible for core staff to become blinkered and jealous of curriculum areas that receive extra funding. But at Skerton, subjects that have not been involved, and may never be involved in the curriculum changes, are now asking about teaching and learning styles.

The head teacher and SMT believe that enhancing the vocational curriculum had to be 'a whole school move to solve the problem of a difficult group of young people'. Selection still operates in Lancaster and some youngsters saw themselves as failures. Now there is an increase in young people progressing into further education and feedback from staff at the college is very good. College staff say that young people from Skerton are much more advanced than those from other schools in ways of working, particularly in the areas of research and making presentations. The school is also aware that when large numbers have opted for Part One GNVQ in some other schools, more able youngsters have been put back into mainstream GCSE and only a small group of low-achieving youngsters have been allowed to participate. This practice never operated at Skerton – all pupils study a vocational course as an entitlement at Key stage 4 and the head teacher is an advocate of this approach.

Attendance, discipline and the image of the school have improved during the management of the change. The school believes that certain things have to be in place for success to happen: money to invest in the infrastructure; committed and experienced staff (either bought in or in place); contact with colleges, business and industry; and communication within and outside school.

Westleigh High School

Six years ago Westleigh High School was low in the league tables. It decided to go for Technology College status. There was a need for both relevance and motivation within the curriculum. The vocationally experienced deputy head (now the head teacher) and the application of the first round of Education Action Zone (EAZ) status gave both support and encouragement for the growth in the vocational curriculum. The school presently offers three Part One GNVQs and three NVQs. There are now 60–70% of pupils at Key stage 4 involved in vocational learning.

The original decision to offer these qualifications was made by the SMT and there have been strong links with the local colleges and EBP. The EBP continues to offer support, mainly through training arranged across the borough. It offers support for work experience placements through its Trident database.

Change has evolved within the school. Parents' and pupils' growing awareness of the achievements and successes taking place has allowed this to happen. The school acknowledges that pupils have different strengths and talents, and there is a desire to offer a range of routes to allow pupils to develop them.

Teaching staff were consulted at the planning stage about what courses the school would offer and decisions were taken regarding staffing, resources and timetabling for the curriculum changes. Staffing was agreed within the technology faculty as all vocational learning is presently offered through this faculty. This is presently under review in the light of the new GCSEs in vocational subjects. Staff development for curriculum change is identified in consultation with staff and undertaken through Inset at the school.

Teachers have the opportunity to undertake work experience in industry, linked to their teaching responsibilities and this is supported by the EBP's teacher placement programme. Cross-authority writing groups were formed to produce assignments and there was an opportunity for teachers to undertake Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) qualifications (this is still a requirement for the delivery of NVQs). Wigan's EBP is very active and keeps teachers up to date in relation to work-related learning and vocational qualifications, including key skills. It has carried out a work-related learning audit in all of Wigan's secondary and special schools in order to support their development towards the Excellence in Work-Related Learning Award (University of Warwick). The first six schools to complete this work will be assessed in November 2001.

Both curriculum change and quality management are given high priority at Westleigh. The school attempts to make use of and value the experiences of their staff and is about to undertake an audit of vocationally relevant experience.

Although staff working within the vocational curriculum accept that they were provided with adequate support to effectively meet the challenges of the changing curriculum, it is also acknowledged that it takes a lot of motivation on the part of individual staff to make it a success. The support they found most useful came from their EBP, LEA and EAZ. It is essential that the head teacher, SMT and the timetabler support and understand the needs of the vocational curriculum. Staff feel that improvements could still be made to the time allowance and teacher/pupil ratio. Because the current vocational curriculum is presently focused within one faculty, the staff within that faculty have felt a strong ownership. However, the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects and the relaunch of a school-based EBP will be a challenge for the whole school.

Parental perceptions of vocational qualifications and timetabling are still seen to be barriers to curriculum change within the school. Raising awareness of the need for flexible timetabling is seen to be the answer. There is a great deal of data from government departments and researchers that supports the need for flexible timetabling. Staff would like some training in interpreting this data.

For Westleigh High School, the most successful outcomes from the decision to move into vocational education have been increased motivation and improved attainment and achievement of the young people. The change has brought youngsters back into a learning/education frame of mind.

In order for schools to introduce vocational qualifications, Westleigh staff recommend that there is strong SMT support, and that:

- adequate time is provided for planning and timetabling (Westleigh staff were given a week off timetable to write a scheme of work, individual assignments and student handbooks)
- consideration is given to the pupil/teacher ratio
- teachers are provided with support
- provision should be integral and not 'bolt on'
- the right staff are used, ie willing, enthusiastic and able to take on appropriate teaching and learning styles
- the timetabler allows blocks of time for links and practical work.

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